3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

the hottest month of the year. June to September constitutes the rainy season, and from October to December the larger part of the country is flooded with water, but the marshes and smaller Khors[1] all dry up by April. From November to April the climate is not unhealthy for Europeans. During the wet season mosquitoes are numerous. Malaria and black water fever are the diseases most dangerous to white people.

SOIL

The country is a plain with only inconsiderable elevations, on which the villages of the natives are built. The soil is black and fertile near the river and the khors, back from the water courses it is in most places poorer, sometimes sandy.

VEGETATION

The chief vegetation is high grass, interspersed with shrubs. A light forest of acacia trees is found mainly along the Nile. The acacia is the chief representative of the tree-flora: heglig (Balanites aegyptiaca), sont-acacia (Acacia arabica), Talh (Acacia Seyal), different kinds of gum-acacias, etc. A characteristic feature of the landscape are groups of deleib- and dom-palms (Borassus flabellifer and Hyphaena Thebaica); a beautiful tree is the mahogany tree (Khaya senegalensis); it is most useful as timber, but seems to be rather rare in the Shilluk country; other notable trees are: different kinds of Ficus (Sycomore fig), the ardeib tree (Tamarindus indicus), nabag (a fruit tree) etc. The vegetation on the river is most luxuriant. Though this is not the region of the sudd, yet the river is at most times largely covered with single plants and swimming islands, formed of papyrus, ambach (Herminiera Elaphroxylon), several kinds of reeds, lotus, Umm Suf (Vossia procera), Potamogeton, Ottelia, and many others. The floating vegetation often serves birds for a fishing place. Trees are much hampered in their growth by the fires which the natives light while the grass is dry; the reason for burning the grass is to hunt up game, and to get the ground cleared for cultivation.

ANIMALS

The country being thickly populated, game is not very numerous. But at some distance from the settlements large animals are still frequent, chiefly near the river towards Lake No; the neighbourhood of Kaka and north of it are also rich in game. Elephants, giraffes, buffaloes are met with, though not very frequently; antelopes and gazelles abound: bushbuck (Tragelaphus scriptus), reedbuck (Cervicapra bohor), white-eared cob (Cobus leucotis), ariel (Gazella soemmeringi), dorcas (G. dorcas), isabelline gazelle (G. isabella), oryx, waterbuck (Cobus defassa), Mrs. Gray's waterbuck (Cobus maria), gazella rubifrons, roan antelope (Hippotragus equinus bakeri), hartebeest (Bubalis jacksoni), tiang or Bastard Hartebeest (Damaliscus tiang), Oribi antelope (Ourebia) etc. Of the carnivorous family the most notable are: lion, leopard, jackal, hyena, fox, Zorilla (a little black-and-white animal resembling the American skunk),

[1] Khor (Arab) = water course drying up in the rainless season.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

342 circumference of the finished wall. About two feet inside the trench are set forked stakes about two feet high and four feet apart. The rafter poles are now placed with heavy end in trench and resting in the forks of these poles, their tops are brought together and securely tied. The heavy grass bands are now fastened both above and under the poles at regular distances from bottom to top of roof. Corn stalks or cane are woven in between the bands and poles thickly. The roof now has its final conical shape. The roof is ready to be raised and is picked up and placed evenly upon the wall. A layer of mud is then put over the lower end of the rafter poles, to keep it firmly in place. The first work in thatching is to put on what the Shullas call the apron of the house. A short layer of grass is put around the top of the wall and tied securely to the thatching. The thatcher then starts his course straight up the roof and works around the house, finishing the entire length of the roof as he goes around. The grass is tossed up to him in small bundles, which he places in position several at a time and removes the bands and ties then down tightly. With a paddle-shaped stick he evens up the ends of the grass, so that when the roof is finished nothing but the but ends of the grass are exposed, and these lie as evenly as though they had been laid separately by hand. At the top the grass is brought together like a spire and wrapped with rope and rope bands. The grass lies on the roof from six inches to a foot thick, and if kept free from white ants, will last for five or six years.

2. Different kinds of Soil.

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Dɒ̀dɒ̀ black, rich earth
kwójɒ̀ sandy ground
ónɒ̀lɒ́ red earth as found on river-banks, used for making pots
ánán brownish earth as found on river-banks, used for making pots
àñěkɒ́ red sand
àyéch sand, dust.

3. Field-produce.

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byél dura
ńmɒ̀ sesame
ńɒ̀rɒ̀ bean
kwɒ̀rɒ̀ cotton
búdɒ̀ a small, sweet gourd, is eaten.
ókwɔ̀l an eatable gourd
kɛ̀ŋɒ a gourd for calabashes, not eatable
ɔshɒ̀yɒ́ melon
àtábɒ tobacco
abwok maize.

4. Different kinds of duras.

The common name: *byél*. The common name for white dura: *dgɛ̀ŋɒ̀*.

8:Howell E-4,5 (1937, 1948) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

An analysis of Shilluk marriages has shown that many cattle which should be retained for bridewealth to be used by the bride's male kinsmen are, in fact, frequently paid away as debts, or slaughtered, or sold to obtain cash in times of famine. This is perhaps natural among the Shilluk, who have to place greater reliance on an agricultural economy, but whose agricultural activities are no more productive or reliable than are those in other parts of the Nilotic area.[1]

Pumphrey goes on to say,

> accordingly it seldom occurs that, owing to the death of all the original marriage cattle, the wife's relatives become interested in the breaking up of the marriage. Possibly as a safeguard against this very contingency the Shilluk have a custom which compels the bridegroom, during the first three or four years of his marrige, to replace by living cattle any of the original cattle he paid as bridewealth which may die in the interim.[2]

It is not clear, however, at what stage of marriage the bridegroom is absolved from this responsibility. Some Shilluk say that it no longer applies when the marriage is finally confirmed by the birth of a child and the bride's change of residence.

Pumphrey adds that:

> it is a natural corollary of all this, that the progeny of the marriage cattle are not reclaimed. The claim is for a roughly equivalent amount of cattle. This amount will vary according to the number of children borne to the man by the wife.[3]

The Legitimacy of Children

With regard to the legitimacy of children in case of divorce, we hear that, 'the children born of the dissolved marriage are legitimate irrespective of the smallness of the cattle payments and of the fact that the marriage was short-lived'.[4] Pumphrey mentions, not here but later, that a certain number of cattle must remain with the wife's family if the ex-husband is to retain legal parenthood of these children. If these deductions are not made, the children are automatically classed as *okeijo*.

On this subject Pumphrey says,

> If the wife had produced sufficient children to wipe off the whole bridewealth, the husband will be entitled to receive nothing upon the termination of the marriage, except that . . . if the marriage has been broken through his wife's bad behaviour the husband may be awarded the return of at least a part.[5]

My own investigations lead me to believe that this statement is incorrect, at any rate according to the principles of Shilluk law, for although a husband may be so exasperated by the conduct of his wife as to demand return of all his bridewealth cattle, he can only do so by waiving all legal rights in the children of the union, and he is unlikely to do this.

Among the Shilluk these questions arise principally in connexion with subsequent rights in the bridewealth cattle of a daughter. The question of nomenclature, impor-

[1] Crop production in Shilluk country is unreliable and erratic because the soil on the high ground in the immediate vicinity of the villages is exhausted, while the land in the hinterland is subject to flood owing to poor drainage.

[2] Pumphrey: unpublished records.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Pumphrey, op. cit., p. 26.

[5] Ibid., p. 33.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Chapter II

THE PROMISED LAND

I awoke refreshed from sleep, and in the bright morning sunshine I was able to survey my new dwelling place. It was no Eden. In Africa there are many places of wonderful natural beauty, but Detwok is not one of them. Right in front of the house stood the ignoble remains of a brick kiln, and that together with the dried-up appearance of the soil gave one the impression of standing in a well-burnt brick-field. One looked ahead over an expanse of baked earth scarcely relieved by tufts of grass, yellow and shrivelled by the heat, and low clumps of thorn bushes and saw the river shining in the distance. To right and left of the house, indeed almost surrounding the compound in the rear, was a forest of vicious-looking thorn bush beyond which, half a mile away, could be seen the Shilluk villages thinly strung out in line, like, as one writer has put it, 'beads on a string'. In the compound itself were the Fathers' house, a substantial building just recently completed by the Italian Fathers with bricks burnt in the kiln whose ruins still remained, the Convent of the Sisters and a two-storey building with a school below and chapel above.

The scene was unlovely in the extreme. The earth of all that portion of the Upper Nile Province apart from the swamps is cotton soil, which, though eminently suitable for the growing of cotton, is useful for little else. In the dry season, lasting from November to June, its surface is rough and hard, broken by large cracks into which a bicycle wheel can easily slip as far as the hub; in the time of the rains it soon becomes a mass of grey viscous mud as unsafe for a careless walker as the surface of an ice rink. After a few weeks of heavy rain most of the countryside turns into a vast swamp through which one must wade knee-deep in water,

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

134 struggling at each step to free oneself from the clinging mud underneath. Long after the rains have ceased the swamp remains, only drying up gradually under the heat of the sun and through drainage into the river, until by mid-December the moisture has all been drawn from the earth, and the bright green grass which has covered it during the rains begins to turn yellow and wither.

797 If my new home was no Eden of beauty, neither was it one free from labour and toil. The territory covered by the mission is, I discovered, quite large. In length it is about 70 miles, extending from Kaka, 55 miles to the north, to a point 15 miles south of Detwok; inland it stretches 15 miles [361] from the river where the Shilluk villages farthest from the river are to be found. The 'parish' thus comprises roughly an area of 1,050 square miles and it is a formidable task for two priests to administer it, especially as the most speedy [493] means of transport available is the push bicycle. However, [771] most of the Christians, who at that time were by no means numerous, lived in the villages near the mission, and large areas were without habitation of any kind, so that the task of parochial visitation did not prove as onerous as it might at first appear. The Shilluk are inveterate wanderers and [166] often drift from the villages in which they were born and baptized as far north as Kaka, or inland to the limits of inhabited country. There they will remain for years quite out of touch with the mission and Christian influence, for rarely if ever do they come in to hear Mass and receive the Sacraments. With all the good will in the world it is impossible for two priests, one with the many affairs of the mission to attend to and the other fully occupied in the school, to keep track of these nomads and follow them in their 763 wanderings. But their heavenly mother, Mary, does not for- 797 get them at the hour of their death, and many is the time that a message from a vigilant catechist, or word brought casually by a passing traveller, or, more often than not, a request for a burial cloth from the pagan relatives of the dying Christian sends the priest post-haste a journey of 15 or 20 miles, in the dry season by bicycle, in the rains on foot, to bring the